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ABSTRACT

The Maryland Higher Education Commission conducts annual surveys of talented Maryland high school seniors to learn about their college plans. This report focuses on the results of the survey of high ability students who graduated from a Maryland high school in the spring of 1998. Survey participants were asked to identify the postsecondary institution they planned to attend; the reasons that were most important in arriving at their decisions; their intended academic major; and their financial aid package. Although a majority of National Merit and National Achievement semifinalists in Maryland selected a college or university outside the state, over one-third of these students chose a Maryland campus. A greater percentage of the students who were offered a Maryland Distinguished Scholar Award stayed in the state than National Merit Scholars or National Achievement Semifinalists. A majority of the students who were offered Maryland Distinguished Scholar Awards, however, still chose an out-of-state institution. (Contains 6 tables and the survey.) (JM)

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MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

SURVEY OF COLLEGE PLANS OF MARYLAND HIGH ABILITY STUDENTS

October 1999

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Introduction

Since 1979, the Maryland Higher Education Commission has conducted annual surveys of talented Maryland high school seniors to learn about their college plans. The intentions of these students are important to Maryland postsecondary institutions, since the reputation of a college or university is based in part on its ability to attract students with strong scholastic credentials. Until 1987, the survey included just National Merit or National Achievement Semifinalists, who represent the top 2 percent of all high school graduates academically. In that year, the study was expanded to include recipients of Maryland Distinguished Scholar awards--both for academic achievement and talent in the arts.

This report focuses on the results of the survey of high ability students who graduated from a Maryland high school in Spring 1998. Survey participants were asked to identify:

- the postsecondary institution they planned to attend;
- the reasons that were most important in arriving at their decision;
- their intended academic major; and
- their financial aid package.

Comparisons with the results of studies in previous years were made as appropriate.

Methodology

Questionnaires were mailed in June 1998 to all 585 Maryland high school seniors who were named National Merit or National Achievement Semifinalists or were Maryland Distinguished Scholar recipients. The Commission staff conducted the survey at this time to maximize the number of students who had firm college plans. The response rate of the survey was 60 percent. A copy of the survey instrument is in Appendix A.

General Findings

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Women comprised 57 percent of the high ability students who responded to the survey. Nearly three-fourth of the respondents (74 percent) were white; 14 percent, Asian; 7 percent, African American, and 1 percent, Hispanic (see Table 1). Montgomery County was identified as the residence of 34 percent of the respondents, followed by Baltimore (15 percent), Howard (9 percent) and Harford (7 percent) counties.

Table 1.
Maryland High Ability Students Choice of College
By Ethnicity and Gender

	Out-of-State		Maryland		Percent of
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Total
Ethnic Background					
African American	0.0%	50.0%	36.4%	13.6%	6.6%
White	8.1%	48.4%	30.9%	12.6%	73.9%
Asian	4.2%	72.9%	18.8%	4.2%	14.4%
Hispanic	0.0%	75.0%	0.0%	25.0%	1.2%
Other	7.7%	30.8%	46.2%	15.4%	3.9%
Gender					
Female	6.3%	52.6%	27.6%	13.5%	56.6%
Male	8.8%	49.7%	32.7%	8.8%	43.4%

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students, 1998

Choice of College

Of those students who responded to the survey, 99 percent chose to continue their education beyond high school. Those students who chose not to attend college cited the opportunity to study abroad for a year or the opportunity to work with professional dance companies as reasons for their decision not to continue their education.

The percentage of high ability students who plan to attend a Maryland college or university is provided in Table 2. Although a majority of National Merit and National Achievement Semifinalists in Maryland selected a college or university outside the State, one-third of these highly selective and sought after students chose a Maryland campus. **This is the highest percentage since the survey began in 1979.**

Furthermore, a greater percentage of the students who were offered a Maryland Distinguished Scholar award stayed in the State than has been the case for National Merit or National Achievement Semifinalists. However, a majority of the students who were offered Maryland Distinguished Scholar awards for academic ability still chose an out-of-state institution. This year, nearly 73 percent of students who were offered a Maryland Distinguished Scholar award for their artistic talent planned to attend a Maryland college or university -- **the highest percentage since 1987**.

Table 2.
Maryland High Ability Students
Percentage Who Plan To Attend a Maryland College or University
1990 to 1998

Year	National Merit Semifinalist	Maryland Distinguished Scholar Academic	Talent-Arts
1990	24.2%	42.7%	64.9%
1991	26.0%	33.5%	61.9%
1992	21.4%	42.9%	66.7%
1994	29.9%	36.0%	58.2%
1995	28.9%	44.4%	58.8%
1996	29.0%	39.7%	59.5%
1997	28.2%	50.3%	55.1%
1998	33.1%	39.8%	72.7%

Note: The high ability student survey was not conducted in 1993.

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission. Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students. 1998.

A majority of the 1998 high ability students (51 percent) selected an independent out-of-state institution. The campuses chosen most frequently include:

- Yale University
- Princeton University
- Brown University
- Harvard University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Forty-one percent of Maryland's high ability students decided to enroll at a Maryland public or independent institution in 1998 compared to 35 percent in 1990. Maryland public four-year colleges and universities enrolled 30 percent of these students; independent institutions, 10 percent; and community colleges, 1 percent . These figures are presented in Table 3.

University of Maryland, College Park continues to recruit the largest percentage of high ability students of any Maryland institution. The figure has risen from 17 percent to 22 percent since 1990.

Table 3.
Colleges and Universities Selected by High Ability Students
Selected Years: 1990 and 1998

Segment	1990	1998
Community Colleges		
Anne Arundel	0.2%	0.3%
Baltimore City	0.2%	-
Hagerstown	0.2%	0.3%
Harford	-	0.3%
Montgomery	0.2%	-
Prince George's	0.2%	-
Subtotal - Community Colleges	0.9%	0.9%
Four-Year Public		
Frostburg	0.5%	0.3%
Salisbury	1.4%	1.8%
Towson	2.3%	3.2%
UMBC	2.9%	2.1%
UMCP	17.0%	21.5%
Morgan	-	0.3%
St. Mary's	1.4%	0.6%
Subtotal-Four-Year Public	25.5%	29.8%
Independent Institutions		
Capitol	-	0.3%
Goucher	0.5%	0.6%
Hood	0.4%	0.3%
Johns Hopkins	2.1%	3.8%
Loyola	1.6%	1.5%
MD Institute of Art	1.6%	1.5%
Notre Dame	0.4%	-
Peabody	-	0.6%
Villa Julie	-	0.3%
St. Johns	0.2%	-
Washington Bible	0.2%	-
Washington College	0.5%	-
Western Maryland	1.1%	1.2%
Subtotal-Independent Colleges	8.6%	10.1%
Total- All Maryland Institutions	**35.0%**	**40.8%**
U.S. Naval Academy	0.7%	0.9%
Other States		
Public	15.4%	7.4%
Private	48.9%	51.2%
Total Other States	**64.3%**	**58.6%**

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students, 1998

Academic Plans

Almost all the respondents indicated that they had selected a major. A majority of the high ability students intend to study engineering (23 percent), biological science (14 percent) or fine and applied arts (12 percent). Science and technology related fields (especially engineering) have been the most popular majors throughout the history of the survey. Of the students who planned to study engineering, mathematics, business or physical science, most selected an out-of-state institution. A majority of students who chose computer science, architecture, languages or health as their major picked a Maryland public institution (Table 4).

Table 4.
Maryland High Ability Students Choice of College
By Intended Major

	Out-of-State		Maryland		Percent of
Intended Major	Public	Private	Public	Private	Total
Architecture	-	20.0%	80.0%	-	2.2%
Biological Science	6.5%	29.0%	51.6%	12.9%	13.9%
Business	15.8%	47.4%	31.6%	5.3%	8.5%
Communications	-	50.0%	50.0%	-	2.7%
Computer Science	-	31.3%	62.5%	6.3%	7.2%
Engineering	9.8%	62.7%	19.6%	7.8%	22.9%
Fine & Applied Arts	3.8%	30.8%	50.0%	15.4%	11.7%
Languages	-	33.3%	66.7%	-	2.7%
Health	7.7%	38.5%	53.8%	-	5.8%
Home Economics	-	100.0%	-	-	0.4%
Law	100.0%	-	-	-	0.4%
Letters	-	66.7%	16.7%	16.7%	2.7%
Mathematics	40.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	2.2%
Physical Science	7.1%	50.0%	35.7%	7.1%	6.3%
Psychology	-	75.0%	25.0%	-	1.8%
Social Science	21.1%	50.0%	5.6%	22.2%	8.1%
Total	9.0%	44.4%	36.3%	9.0%	100.0%

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students, 1998

Financial Aid

High ability students who selected a Maryland public campus have consistently had much more of their first year's college costs covered by financial aid than have talented students who have gone out-of-state. In 1998, 39 percent had all their first year college costs covered.

Most of the students who chose an out-of-state college or university or a Maryland independent institution had a much smaller percentage of their initial year's cost covered by financial assistance. In nearly every year, a majority of the students attending an out-of-state institution (either public or private) had no more than 25 percent of their first year costs covered by financial assistance.

Table 5.
Maryland High Ability Students
Percentage of First-Year Educational Costs Covered by Financial Aid

Percentage of	Out-of-State		Maryland		All
Educational Costs Covered	Public	Private	Public	Private	Students
0% to 25%	52.0%	64.5%	12.9%	23.5%	43.4%
26% to 50%	8.0%	10.5%	14.9%	17.6%	12.3%
51% to 75%	12.0%	12.2%	21.8%	17.6%	15.6%
76% to 99%	12.0%	9.9%	11.9%	26.5%	12.3%
100%	16.0%	2.9%	38.6%	14.7%	16.5%

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students, 1998

Reasons for Choice of Institution

What are the factors that high ability students indicated were important in their choice of a college? To identify some of the most important reasons why these high ability students made the decisions they did, students were asked to indicate the degree of importance of 24 factors that may have contributed to their choice of college. Students could respond that a particular factor was very important, somewhat important, or not important in their selection process.

Table 6 contains the percentage of respondents who ranked each item as "very important" to their decision. The reasons that were instrumental in attracting the greatest number of students were the quality and selectivity of the school and the students' planned academic program:

- Overall reputation of the college (73 percent)
- Superior program in intended major (67 percent)
- Faculty commitment to good teaching (66 percent)
- Success of graduates in finding a job or gaining admission to graduate or professional school (62 percent)
- Quality of student body (55 percent)
- Appearance or atmosphere of the college (52 percent)

Forty percent cited financial assistance and a good faculty/student ratio as key considerations, and 30 percent or more mentioned good impressions of the school, special programs, college social life, and the size of the student body.

Table 6.
Maryland High Ability Students
Percentage Who Rated Certain Factors As Very Important
To Their Decision to Attend a College or University
By Type of Institution

Factors	Out-of-State Public	Out-of-State Private	Maryland Public	Maryland Private	All Students
Reputation of school	80.0%	82.8%	50.0%	81.1%	72.9%
Superior program in intended major	68.0%	68.0%	67.6%	61.1%	67.2%
Faculty commitment to good teaching	62.5%	72.8%	49.5%	80.6%	65.9%
Graduates are successful	66.7%	68.4%	43.0%	80.6%	62.2%
Quality of student body	54.2%	77.6%	23.0%	38.9%	54.9%
Appearance of campus	58.3%	59.2%	38.0%	52.8%	52.2%
Better financial assistance offered	37.5%	19.0%	75.2%	47.2%	40.4%
Good faculty/student ratio	16.7%	46.8%	23.2%	66.7%	39.5%
School made a good impression	36.0%	37.4%	20.4%	47.2%	33.4%
Special programs for acad. talented	36.0%	22.8%	54.0%	19.4%	32.6%
Social life at the college	33.3%	38.2%	20.0%	36.1%	32.0%
The size of the student body not too large	29.2%	36.2%	10.1%	55.6%	30.0%
Wanted to live away from home	29.2%	36.8%	13.0%	19.4%	26.8%
Tuition cost are less	29.2%	7.0%	61.0%	16.7%	26.1%
Diversity of the student body	4.2%	28.7%	16.0%	8.3%	20.6%
Good graduate program in major	29.2%	17.9%	17.3%	16.7%	18.8%
Parent(s) felt it was the best choice	16.7%	19.1%	20.0%	11.1%	18.0%
College location	12.5%	18.4%	11.1%	19.4%	15.7%
Knew more about it than other college	16.0%	6.4%	21.2%	16.7%	12.8%
Wanted to attend college close to home	8.3%	2.3%	14.0%	25.0%	8.6%
Friends recommended it	0.0%	10.3%	8.0%	8.3%	8.6%
Teacher or counselor recommended it	8.3%	10.5%	5.1%	5.6%	8.1%
Sports/athletics program	12.5%	5.7%	5.1%	11.1%	6.8%
Religious/ethnic considerations	0.0%	7.5%	4.0%	5.6%	5.7%

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission, Survey of The College Plans of High Ability Students, 1998

In contrast, economic considerations emerged as a strong force for students selecting Maryland public colleges and universities. Seventy-five percent of these students cited better financial assistance and 61 percent cited lower tuition costs as major reasons for their decision to go to a public campus in Maryland. Economic considerations were not as significant for those students enrolling in out-of-state colleges. In addition, a greater proportion of the seniors enrolling at a Maryland public institution than all respondents (54 percent to 33 percent) stressed the availability of special programs for academically talented students. Many of these students indicated in written comments that the Honors and

Gemstone Program at College Park were strong influences in their decision to attend that institution.

Maryland Distinguished Scholar recipients were asked whether the award played an important role in determining their college choice. The proportion who deemed it very important has ranged between 18 and 29 percent since 1990. More than 40 percent of the 1998 Distinguished Scholar recipients indicated that the award was not important in influencing their selection of a college.

Students attending an out-of-state institution were asked to suggest changes or improvements they thought would make Maryland's public colleges and universities more attractive to academically talented students. Frequent recommendations included: improving the academic reputation of and programs offered by in-state schools, decreasing the size of UMCP's student body, and enhancing the quality of the student body and selectivity at Maryland public institutions.

APPENDIX A

Maryland Higher Education Commission
16 Francis Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1781

Survey of Academically Talented High School Seniors

Please fill in blanks or circle the number next to the most appropriate response.

1. Do you plan to attend college next fall?
   1- Yes ⇨ If Yes, continue with question 2
   2- No ⇨ If NO, please explain why below
   3- Undecided ⇨ Please explain why below

   _____
   _____

If you do not plan to attend college next fall or are undecided, you should stop here. The rest of the questionnaire does not apply to you. Please return the questionnaire in the postage-paid envelope.

We thank you for your help and time.

2. Have you decided which college you will attend next fall?
   1- Yes
   2- No ⇨ If No, skip to question 7.

In responding to questions 3 and 4, if referring to a multi-campus university, specify which campus. For example, instead of writing "University of Maryland" you should write "Univ. of Md-College Park", or "Univ. of Md.-Balto Co.", etc.

3. Which college or university do you plan to attend next fall?

   _____

4. To which other colleges or universities did you actually apply?

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. Approximately what proportion of your first year college costs (tuition and fees, room and board) will be covered by the financial aid package you have been offered at the college you plan to attend next fall?

   1- 0-25%
   2- 26-50%
   3- 51-75%
   4- 76-99%
   5- 100%

6. Please rate how important was each of the factors listed below in your choice of a college or university. Using the following scale, write the appropriate rating in the blank next to each factor:
   1- Very important
   2- Somewhat important
   3- Not important

   a. Overall reputation of the college ____
   b. Had a superior program in your intended major ____
   c. Better financial assistance offered ____
   d. Wanted to live away from home ____
   e. Attracted by the quality of the student body ____
   f. Parent(s) felt it was the best choice ____
   g. Wanted to attend college close to home ____
   h. Attracted by the diversity of the student body ____
   i. Tuition costs are less ____
   j. Teacher or counselor recommended it ____
   k. Knew more about it than other college ____
   l. Wanted to go to school in the area in which the school is located ____
   m. Friends recommended it ____
   n. Special programs for academically talented students ____
   o. The size of the student body not too large ____
   p. Contacts by the school made a good impression ____
   q. Had a good graduate program in your intended major ____
   r. Good campus athletics or sports program ____
   s. Impressed by the appearance or atmosphere of the campus ____
   t. Graduates have reputation for success in finding a job or getting into graduate/professional school ____
   u. Social life at the college ____
   v. Good faculty/student ratio ____
   w. Faculty commitment to good teaching ____
   x. Religious or ethnic considerations ____
   y. Other reason(s):

   _____

   _____

   _____

7. a. Have you decided what undergraduate program or major you will pursue?
      1- Yes
      2- No
   b. If Yes, what is this major?

   _____

OVER ⇨

8. Have you been offered a Maryland Distinguished Scholar Award and, if so, how important was it to your college choice?
   1- No
   2- Yes, very important
   3- Yes, somewhat important
   4- Yes, not important

9. a. Have you been actively recruited by any public colleges or universities in Maryland?
      1- Yes, I have been sent unsolicited literature about a college
      2- Yes, I have been contacted personally by a representative from a college
      3- Yes, both of the above
      4- No, I have not been actively recruited
   b. If yes, which colleges or universities?

_____

_____

_____

10. What is your sex?
    1- Female
    2- Male

11. What is your race/ethnic origin?
    1- Asian
    2- Black
    3- Hispanic
    4- White
    5- Other

12. In what county do you live? _____

    (Please use number corresponding to county.)

    1- Allegany
    2- Anne Arundel
    3- Baltimore County
    4- Calvert
    5- Caroline
    6- Carroll
    7- Cecil
    8- Charles
    9- Dorchester
    10- Frederick
    11- Garrett
    12- Harford
    13- Howard
    14- Kent
    15- Montgomery
    16- Prince George's
    17- Queen Anne's
    18- St. Mary's
    19. Somerset
    20. Talbot
    21- Washington
    22- Wicomico
    23- Worchester
    24- Baltimore City
    25- Out-of-state

13. a. If you plan to attend a public college or university in Maryland, please share with us your overall reasoning for making that decision, especially why you chose a public Maryland institution over other colleges and universities.
    b. If you plan to attend an out-of-state institution or a private institution in Maryland, please suggest changes or improvements that you think would make Maryland's public colleges and universities more attractive to academically talented students like yourself.

Thank you very much for your help and time. If you would like to receive a copy of the survey report when it is completed, please fill in your name and home address below:

Name_____

Street_____

City/State/Zip_____

Please mail this survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.